RAJYA SABHA

Thursday, the 23rd October, 2008/1 Kartika, 1930 (Saka)

The House met at eleven of the clock,
MR. CHAIRMAN in the Chair.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

MR. CHAIRMAN: Q. No. 81 ...*(Interruptions)*... Hon'ble Member absent. ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRI PRAVEEN RASHTRAPAL (Gujarat): Mr. Chairman, Sir, the Supreme Court has proved what was understood. ...*(Interruptions)*...

MR. CHAIRMAN: Please allow the Question Hour to proceed ...*(Interruptions)*... Please don't interrupt. ...*(Interruptions)*... Q.No. 82. Hon'ble Member absent.

श्री परषोत्तम खोडाभाई रूपाला (गुजरात) : सुनिए ... सुनिए ... तीन हजार कार्यकर्त्ताओं ने कांग्रेस को छोड़ दिया। ...(**व्यवधान**)...

MR. CHAIRMAN: Q.No. 83. Shri N.K. Singh. ...*(Interruptions)*... Please allow the Question Hour to proceed. Q.No. 83. Shri N.K. Singh. ...*(Interruptions)*...

श्री परषोत्तम खोडाभाई रूपाला : तीन हजार लोगों ने कांग्रेस छोड़ी। ...(**व्यवधान**)... इनको जलन हो रही है। ...(**व्यवधान**)... सर, तीन हज़ार लोगों ने कल कांग्रेस छोड़ी। तीन हज़ार लोगों ने, इसलिए इन लोगों को जलन हो रही है। ...(**व्यवधान**)... तीन हज़ार लोगों ने कांग्रेस छोड़ी, कल छोड़ी ...(**व्यवधान**)... कल छोड़ी, तीन हजार कांग्रेस के लोगों ने। ...(**व्यवधान**)...

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon'ble Members, please resume your places. Please allow the Question Hour to proceed. Shri N.K Singh.

* 81. *[The questioner (Shri Ramdas Agarwal) was absent. For answer *vide* page 18 *infra*.]

* 82. *[The questioner (Shri Rajeev Shukla and Dr. T. Subbarami Reddy) were absent. For answer vide page 19 *infra*.]

Untapped reserves of uranium in India

*83. SHRIMATI JAYA BACHCHAN:
SHRI N.K. SINGH:††
Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that our nuclear plants are presently starved because of non-availability of uranium;

(b) if so, whether it is a fact that there are massive untapped reserves of uranium, estimated at over 1 lakh tonnes, in the States of Jharkhand, Meghalaya, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan and Tamilnadu; and

(c) the reasons for these reserves having remained untapped, whereas we have been pursuing foreign resources?

†† The question was actually asked on the floor of the House by Shri N.K. Singh.

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE (SHRI PRITHVIRAJ CHAVAN): (a) to (c) A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

Statement

(a) Fuel demand – supply mismatch has led to operations of nuclear power plants at reduced capacity factors.

(b) Atomic Minerals Directorate for Exploration and Research (AMD) has identified just above 1 lakh tonnes reserves of uranium in the States of Jharkhand, Meghalaya, Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan. Mines are either in production or in development covering all viable deposits in Jharkhand which accounts for nearly half of this resource. Concerted efforts have been made to develop mines in other states over last several years and are expected to produce positive results in spite of difficulties such as land acquisition, mining lease, rehabilitation/resettlement of affected persons, environmental and forest clearances, public consensus etc.

(c) While there is no slackening of efforts to fully tap all potentially viable uranium resources, efforts to access foreign resources should be seen as efforts to bring in additionality to domestic resources.

SHRI N.K. SINGH: Sir, my first supplementary to the hon. Minister is that considering the shortage of uranium from domestic sources, has there been any concerted effort to look at the nascent technologies, including involvement in the public-private partnership which can enhance prospecting, and thereby harnessing thereafter the uranium reserves which we have?

SHRI PRITHVIRAJ CHAVAN: Sir, the current law allows only a Central Government company to enter the field of atomic energy and mining of atomic minerals which means that a company can be formed in a minority partnership by private sector, subject to, of course, Government clearances. But the entire private activity is not permitted by the current legislation. We are going ahead with many different ideas to involve latest technology, both in prospecting and mining. Some work for mining has been outsourced to speed up the work in Jharkhand area, and also new mines that have been opened up in Andhra Pradesh, and the mines which are in Mizoram and Meghalaya, are undergoing environmental clearances. We have total proven reserves of over 1,13000 tonnes of uranium, and we are trying to expedite mining of uranium, and of course, the current arrangement for opening up the international trade will allow us to import uranium to overcome that temporary mismatch.

SHRI N.K. SINGH: Sir, my second supplementary is that considering the shortage of uranium which is domestically available, what efforts are being taken to optimise the use of the existing uranium and to substantially bring down the cost of production of civil nuclear energy from uranium sources. Currently, as the hon. Minister is aware, the production of civil nuclear energy from nuclear sources is vastly more costly, than other more conventional uses by which power can be generated. Are there efforts on, which can substantially reduce the cost of nuclear energy as compared to the other fossil based fuel energy?

SHRI PRITHVIRAJ CHAVAN: Sir, I think it is not right to say that nuclear energy is more expensive. As a matter of fact, the current, normative cost of nuclear energy is Rs.2.28 P. But

nuclear energy becomes viable at a great distance from the mine-mouth coal plants. At the pithead coal plants, it will always be more economical. That is why the nuclear power plants, so far, have been established at great distances away from the coal areas. And as I said, the cost is quite competitive. The question put by the hon. Member was: what is being done to augment production and make the optimum uses of fuel? Sir, when we had a temporary mismatch of fuel demand and supply, the atomic scientists have worked with various ideas of reactor physics by changing the composition of fuel and, then, extending the uranium utilisation by about 20 per cent more. Whatever was possible to be done in the shortest period has been done. We are looking forward to the situation where uranium will be imported, and constant efforts are going on in various establishments of the Government of India to evolve new nuclear reactor designs and get a better or the optimum use of fuel that is available with us, which includes uranium and other materials also.

SHRI YASHWANT SINHA: Sir, it is a matter of great satisfaction that the Atomic Minerals Directorate for Exploration and Research has identified, so far, reserves of one lakh tonnes of uranium in the country. We are aware of the fact that the Jharkhand mines have been under exploitation for quite some time. I would like the Minister to confirm in this House whether the Government has taken a decision, recently, to start exploiting the mines in Andhra Pradesh; whether it is a fact that the mining and processing of uranium is a process which is going to be completed in three years' time, and that from Andhra Pradesh alone, we shall have enough uranium supplies to support a 10,000 MW electricity generation capacity in this country for the next 50 years or so.

And part (b) of the question, Sir, is this. I read in the newspapers that efforts were on in Meghalaya to call an all-party meeting to remove the objections which are there from NGOs and others about the exploitation of the uranium mines in deposits in Meghalaya. What is the progress with regard to that?

SHRI PRITHVIRAJ CHAVAN: Sir, it is quite correct and I thank the hon. Minister for complimenting the Department for. ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRI YASHWANT SINHA: Member, Sir!

SHRI PRITHVIRAJ CHAVAN: Hon. Member.

SHRI YASHWANT SINHA: That will come later!

SHRI PRITHVIRAJ CHAVAN: Yes. A long time later! ...*(Interruptions)*... After many, many years! ...*(Interruptions)*... I wish all the best, anyway. Sir, I thank the Member for informing the House that the Atomic Minerals Directorate has done a good work. Sir, it is a fact that we have opened a new mine in Andhra Pradesh, in Cuddapah District. But it is not that the current Andhra Pradesh mine itself will not support our 10,000 MW programme; that is the Tamarapalli Mine in Cuddapah District. It is going to be commissioned by September 2010.

Sir, we have another mine at Lambapur. Peddagattu Mining Project is also there. It is currently facing problems in getting environmental clearances. So, that is the position about the Andhra Pradesh area. We are hopeful of increasing our production there.

In the Meghalaya area, which is a much richer area, this Project was identified as far back as 1983. The successive Governments tried to get the environmental clearances, but it has still not

happened. There are some objections by NGOs. They have been met. Many people, particularly the Student Union, were taken to other mining areas in Jharkhand and all that, and were shown that there are no negative effects. Actually, there will be huge benefit. We are quite hopeful of resolving the Meghalaya problem, the KPM mines in Meghalaya. But efforts are going on from 1993, and if the mine opens up very soon, then, we will augment our indigenous supply substantially.

SHRI JESUDASU SEELAM: Sir, the hon. Minister in his reply has stated that efforts are on to access foreign resources and also to bring in uranium from abroad. I have read a report that South Africa has conveyed to India that it is not averse to supply: uranium to India. An Indian company, recently, seems to have bagged exclusive right for exploring and mining uranium in Nigeria. Will the hon. Minister give the details, if it is so?

SHRI PRITHVIRAJ CHAVAN: Sir, I would not like to get into the area where we are going to import our uranium fuel from. That would require a separate notice. But we are open to start joint uranium mining projects in other countries. Some exploratory work has been undertaken already. We have received offers. That is an area which we are certainly willing to look at in all countries where there are possibilities for joint uranium mining projects.

SHRI MATILAL SARKAR: Sir, the question refers to the domestic reserves of uranium. We could learn that there is a possible reserve of one lakh tonnes of uranium which we can get for generating power in the energy sector. My question is: Will the hon. Minister let us know whether the generation of energy from the uranium in the country will be less costly than from the uranium imported from abroad? Why are we not laying much more stress on deriving power from the domestic uranium resources than going abroad?

SHRI PRITHVIRAJ CHAVAN: Sir, I will try to explain. But I must inform the House that the quality of uranium ore that is available in India is quite low. So, the cost of getting uranium from our indigenous ore is relatively more expensive. But it is a very strategic material, at whatever cost we get it; and whatever indigenous material is there, we will exploit that fully. Right now there is a mismatch. We need more uranium which is being augmented by foreign supply. We are making all efforts to augment our own uranium mining. But the cost of uranium – I understand that is what you have mentioned – would, perhaps, be a little bit inexpensive abroad. We are going into it. But the cost of fuel is not such an important factor.

SHRI MATILAL SARKAR: It is our own resource. Is it not?

SHRI PRITHVIRAJ CHAVAN: Yes. We are trying to maximise it. I have said that we are trying to maximise our own indigenous uranium resources that are already prospected, about 116 thousand tonnes, and every year the figure goes on increasing and we find more and more areas. But there are difficulties. The environment clearance takes a long time. I have explained the Meghalaya project. Since 1993 we have been trying to get the clearance. It is taking time. The only new mining project that has been opened is in Andhra Pradesh. We will exploit every kilogram of uranium that is available in our country at whatever cost because it is our uranium. In the short run, if it is required to be augmented with imported resources, we will do that.